

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AMEMBASSY VIENNA

C O N F I D E N T I A L USUN 5855

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PDEV, PINT, TS, AU
SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN APPROACH CONCERNING STABILITY OF
TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT

1. AUSTRIAN PERMREP JANKOWITSCH DECEMBER 29 CALLED ON AMB YOUNG TO EXPRESS HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE "FRAGILE NATURE OF THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA". JANKOWITSCH SUGGESTED THAT A GENERAL AMNESTY OF EXILED POLITICAL FIGURES LIKE AHMED BEN SALAH WOULD HELP IN THE REESTABLISHMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE EMERGENCE OF A POPULAR-BASED REGIME IN TUNISIA. HE SUGGESTED THAT, WITH PRESIDENT CARTER'S AVOWED INTEREST IN HUMAN RIGHTS, HIS INFLUENCE ON BOURGUIBA "WOULD NOT REMAIN WITHOUT EFFECT". HE ALSO SUGGESTED THAT BOURGUIBA'S SON, HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR., MIGHT BE A SUITABLE CHANNEL FOR A MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA. JANKOWITSCH LEFT AN "AIDE MEMOIRE" SETTING FORTH THESE VIEWS, THE TEXT OF WHICH IS TRANSMITTED PARA 4 BELOW.

2. IN DISCUSSING THE SITUATION, JANKOWITSCH SAID HE WAS A FRIEND OF BEN SALAH'S, AND THAT THE AUSTRIAN VICE CHANCELLOR ALSO WOULD BE PLEASED IF THE US SAW FIT TO SHOW SOME INTEREST IN THE TUNISIAN SITUATION. HE SAID
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THE EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS ARE TOO WEAK AND DIVIDED TO DO ANYTHING, AND THE FRENCH DON'T CARE ABOUT THE INSTABILITY IN TUNISIA -- THEY ONLY SEEK TO CONDUCT BUSINESS. JANKOWITSCH EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS NOT SUGGESTING AN INAPPROPRIATE US INTERVENTION IN DOMESTIC TUNISIAN AFFAIRS, BUT ONLY A SHOW OF HIGH-LEVEL INTEREST THROUGH A PRIVATE CHANNEL IN SEEING SOME GESTURES LIKE AN AMNESTY

THAT WOULD POINT TUNISIA IN A DEMOCRATIC DIRECTION.

3. APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS/GUIDANCE FOR RESPONSE TO JANKOWITSCH.

4. TEXT OF AIDE MEMOIRE FOLLOWS: QUOTE

AIDE MEMOIRE

RE: RETURN TO DEMOCRACY IN TUNISIA

OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS A GOVERNMENT CRISIS WHICH LED TO THE RESIGNATION OF VIRTUALLY ALL SIGNIFICANT MEMBERS IN PRIME MINISTER HEDI NOUIRAH'S GOVERNMENT HAS SHOWN THE FRAGILE NATURE OF THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT BOURGIBA.

WHILE A HANDFULL OF FAITHFULL SUPPORTERS OF THE PRESIDENT AND HIS HEIR APPARENT, HEDI NOUIRAH, REMAIN IN THE GOVERNMENT, MOST OF THE REPRESENTATIVE ELEMENTS OF TUNISIAN POLITICAL LIFE ARE NOW EITHER IN EXILE OR IN OPPOSITION.

THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE AUTHORITARIAN ONE-MAN-RULE OF PRESIDENT BOURGIBA WHICH IS ILL-DISGUISED BEHIND THE ERODING FACADE OF HIS NEO-DESTOUR PARTY WHICH - ALTHOUGH NOW CALLED THE SOCIALIST DESTOUR PARTY - HAS FAILED TO WIN THE ENDORSEMENT OF EUROPEAN CONFIDENTIAL

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AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL DEMOCRATS NOW COMPRISE A BROAD POLITICAL SPECTRUM EXTENDING FROM THE CONSERVATIVE RIGHT (SUCH AS FORMER MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR TAHAR BELKHODJA) VIA THE LIBERAL CENTRE (SUCH AS FORMER FOREIGN MINSTER MASMOUDI AND FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER MESTIRI) TO THE STRONG, UNION BASED DEMOCRATIC LEFT OF FORMER MINISTER OF PLANNING AND ECONOMICS, AHMED BEN SALAH WHO IS NOW LEADING THE MASS OPPOSITION MOVEMENT MUP (MOUVEMENT DE L'UNITEPOPULAIRE).

THE EVENTS LEADING TO THE MASS RESIGNATIONS IN THE TUNISIAN CABINET MIGHT LEAD PRESIDENT BOURGIBA TO RE-THINK THE BASIS OF HIS REGIME.

STABILIZING THE SHAKY HOLD WHICH THE AGEING, CRONICALLY ILL PRESIDENT MAINTAINS ON WHAT WAS FORMERLY THE MOST LIBERAL AND DEMOCRATIC OF THE MAGHREB COUNTRIES IS ALSO A DICTATE IN THE INTEREST OF GENERAL STABILITY IN THE MEDITERRANENA REGION.

ONE WAY LEADING TO A RAPID RETURN TO DEMOCRACY, RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND EMERGENCE OF

A POPULAR BASED REGIME IN TUNISIA MIGHT BE A GENERAL
AMNESTY WHICH WOULD ALLOW THOSE WHO ARE EXILED TO RETURN
HOME AND THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN CONDEMNED TO PRISON TERMS
FOR POLITICAL OFFENSES TO BE RELEASED.

MANY TUNISIANS OF ALL PARTIES ARE NOW LOOKING
TO PRESIDENT CARTER AND HIS GOVERNMENT TO HELP THEM
RESTORE DEMOCRATIC CONDITONS IN THEIR COUNTRYM THEY BELIEVE
THAT INTEREST EXPRESSED BY PRESIDENT CARTER WOULD NOT
REMAIN WITHOUT EFFECT ON PRESIDENT BOURGIBA WHO
(DESPITE STRONG FRENCH INFLUENCE AMONG HIS ADVISERS)
REMAINS AN ADMIRER OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND OTHER
EMINENT AMERICAN LEADERS.

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HABIB BOURGIBA JR., THE PRESIDENT'S SON WHO
IS NO LONGER IN THE CABINET BUT CAN STILL SPEAK TO
HIS FATHER MIGHT BE A SUITABLE PERSON FOR ANY MESSAGE
EXTENDED TO THE COMBATTANT SUPREME (THE NAME BY WHICH
BOURGIBA LIKES TO BE REFERRED TO).

UNQUOTE
YOUNG

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NNN

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